Teaching Elaboration & Word Choice

by LeAnn Nickelsen
# Contents

**Introduction** ........................................... 4

**CHAPTER 1 Elaboration and Word-Choice Lessons**
How to Create Language Lessons That Build Elaboration and Word-Choice Skills ............................. 6
A Sample Lesson: Action Verbs .................................. 7
Starters for More Lessons ......................................... 9
Adjectives and Adverbs ......................................... 9
Description and Detail ........................................ 10
Dialogue ..................................................... 10
Setting ..................................................... 11
Similes ..................................................... 11
Superlatives ................................................ 12
Comparisons and Analogies .................................. 12
Rhyme ..................................................... 12
Examples and Personal Anecdotes ......................... 13
Metaphors .................................................. 13
Personification ............................................. 14
Quotations ................................................ 14
Synonyms ................................................ 14

**Reproducibles**
Elaboration Skill Web ......................................... 15
Brainstorm Sheet .............................................. 16
Writing Organization Sheet .................................. 17

**CHAPTER 2 Elaboration and Word Choice During the Writing Process**
A Nine-Step Plan Integrating Word Choice .................. 18
A Mystery Writing Lesson ................................... 23

**Reproducibles**
Characteristics of a Mystery Story .......................... 27
Mystery Story Brainstorming Sheet ......................... 28
Mystery Story Rubric ........................................ 29
Peer Editing Sheet .......................................... 30

**CHAPTER 3 Elaboration and Word-Choice Activities**
Interactive Bulletin Boards .................................. 31
Graphic Organizers ......................................... 32
Cloze Exercises ........................................... 32
Word-Choice Categories ...................................... 33
A to Z Alliteration Book ...................................... 34
A Word a Day ............................................... 35
Poetry Perks ............................................... 35
Elaborating Sentences ....................................... 39

**Reproducibles**
Blooming Words Template ................................... 40
Ice Cream Parlor Template .................................. 41
Synonym Circles ............................................ 42
Synonym Webs ............................................. 42
Cloze Activity: “The Leaves” ................................ 43
Word-Choice Categories ...................................... 44
A Word a Day ............................................... 45
For the Poetry Book ......................................... 46
Sentence Elaboration ........................................ 47

**CHAPTER 4 Evaluation**
Finding the Value in Content ................................ 48
Promoting Writing Growth ................................... 49
Rethinking the Role of the Teacher ......................... 50

**Reproducibles**
SCAMPER Editing Sheet ...................................... 53
Word-Choice Checklist ....................................... 54
Rate Your Writing Rubric .................................... 55
Rate Their Wording Rubric ................................... 56
A Complete Writing Checklist ............................... 57

**CHAPTER 5 The Writing Notebook**
Section I: Organizational Sheets ............................. 60
Section II: Note-Taking ....................................... 61
Section III: My Writing ....................................... 62

**Reproducibles**
Writing Conference Goals Sheet ............................ 63
Proofreading Marks ......................................... 64

**References** .................................................. Inside Back Cover
ALPHABET STEW
Author Unknown

Words can be stuffy, as sticky as glue, but words can be tutored to tickle you too, to rumble and tumble and tingle and sing, to buzz like a bumblebee, coil like a spring.

Juggle their letters and jumble their sounds, swirl them in circles and stack them in mounds, twist them and tease them and turn them about, teach them to dance upside down, inside out.

Make mighty words whisper and tiny words roar in ways no one ever had thought of before; cook an improbable alphabet stew, and words will reveal little secrets to you.

The power of words, chosen carefully and accurately, is fascinating. In order to understand what makes good writing compelling and to help my students develop their writing skills, I reflected on the work of my favorite authors. In doing this, I noticed a common thread: The words these authors chose quickly drew me into the story. These words elicited strong emotions and painted clear, memorable pictures in my imagination—as if I were watching a great movie.

The more words students know, the better able they are to choose words that communicate clearly and explain dynamically. You can help your students develop their word-choice skills in several ways. Have them:

* Read books of many genres with strong description and vocabulary.
* Listen to enriching language.
Elaboration and Word-Choice Lessons

Elaboration is an important key to making writing come alive. Introduce your students to this concept by telling them that by choosing the right words to use in their writing (word choice) and adding the right words (elaboration) they can communicate their ideas better and make their stories and reports more exciting. Explain that they can build the vocabulary they use every day in speaking and writing by reading books, learning new words, and listening to people speak. Let them know that each vocabulary word that they learn is an accomplishment and will make a difference to their writing.

Elaboration and Word Choice Are . . .

- using specific and accurate words that create the desired meaning
- using lively verbs, colorful adjectives, and specific nouns
- incorporating striking words and phrases that readers won’t forget
- selecting words that linger in the reader’s mind and create curiosity
- choosing natural and individualistic words that portray the author’s personality
- adding specific and precise details (words and phrases) to descriptions

How to Create Language Lessons That Build Elaboration and Word-Choice Skills

A good way to begin building elaboration and word-choice skills is to link these concepts to your language arts lessons. For example, once students know what a verb is, they can learn how to choose better verbs to make their writing more exciting. They
also can learn how to find verbs in other people’s writing and evaluate whether a better verb could have been chosen for a particular sentence. What follows is an example of how I create an elaboration and word-choice skill lesson on action verbs. This will serve as a model for other lessons I suggest, beginning on page 9.

A Sample Lesson: Action Verbs

Beginning each lesson with a motivator (anticipatory set) will heighten student interest. I often use picture books, a section of a novel, stories, or quotes that help students focus on the concept I’m introducing. For example, to build word-choice and elaboration skills during a lesson on verbs, I might read a few pages from Maniac Magee. The author’s wonderful verb choices are always a hit with kids and help open their eyes to all kinds of action-verb possibilities.

At the start of each lesson, I also give students their own copies of the Elaboration Skill Web (page 15). They label it according to the skill being studied and fill it in as we work together.

Next we follow the seven steps on the web sheet. These may vary a bit according to the concept you’re studying.

Step 1. Define the concept and have students as a class write the definition or list of characteristics on the web sheet beside number 1. For example, provide and discuss a definition such as the following for action verbs:

Action verbs are words that express an act, occurrence, or mode of being. In his book On Writing Well, William Zinsser said, “Verbs are the most important of all your tools. They push the sentence forward and give it momentum . . . flail, poke, dazzle, squash, beguile, pamper, swagger, wheedle, vex.”

Now fill in the characteristics with the class.